# Interview with Randolph A. Kidder

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR RANDOLPH A. KIDDER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: December 13, 1989



*Q: Today is December 13, 1989. This is an interview with Ambassador Randolph A. Kidder. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy, and this interview is on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give us a little of your background before you entered the foreign service?*

KIDDER: I was born and raised in the Boston area and I went to preparatory school in Dedham, Massachusetts, at Noble and Greenaugh, and then I went to Harvard. Then to prepare myself for the foreign service exam I went to Paris and spent a year and a half at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques. Mostly, I was learning French. I was not registered as a student, I was not qualified, but then they used to allow you to be sort of an observer.

*Q: When did you graduate from Harvard?*

KIDDER: 1935.

*Q: You mention that you were preparing for the Foreign Service, how did you become interested in the foreign service and foreign affairs in general?*

KIDDER: Traveling with my father who was an archeologist. When I was a young fellow I traveled with him to Scandinavia, and to various parts, and then I went abroad with a student group to Germany, France and England, and it just caught my fancy. I had thought I wanted to be an archeologist, but my elder brother was brighter than I was, and he became one and I didn't.

*Q: Had you met anyone in the Foreign Service?*

KIDDER: Oh yes, people who were Ambassadors then were classmates and colleagues of my father's. And so I talked to quite a few, and I made inquiries at the State Department. In those days it was quite easy to meet an Under-secretary, and so I met quite a few people.

*Q: How did you actually enter the Foreign Service?*

KIDDER: I took the three day written exams in Boston. I think I had 73.5 on the written exams. You needed 70 to take the orals - you took the orals in Washington, where everybody had to come in those days. I think they took twenty of us and they gave me a high enough rating to get an 80 average overall.

*Q: You obviously did well on your oral exam.*

KIDDER: I was very interested in it. There were five people on the examining board in those days, including very senior people, Assistant Secretaries and all, and I quite enjoyed it.

*Q: You entered the foreign service is 1938, could you describe a bit how the initial assignment and the training was at that point?*

KIDDER: At that point, they generally sent you abroad for a year and a half before bringing you back to the Foreign Service School. The married couples they sent to nearby places. In those days they did not pay the wife's travel expenses. I came out of it quite well,

because I didn't mention my wife was with me in the car, and anyway, I only had to go to Montreal from Boston.

*Q: The idea was not to spend much money on this raw material. I interviewed Robert Woodward recently and he said it cost him something like $7 to go by bus to his Canadian post from Wisconsin or Minnesota. What type of work were you doing in Montreal?*

KIDDER: There were two newcomers at all times and they started us out in the Visa section, issuing visitor's visas, and then they had us for a brief time in the economic section and then for a brief time in the citizenship section. Then we sat in the outer office for a time to greet people as they came in.

*Q: How did the foreign service strike you? This was your first look at the real thing.*

KIDDER: Well, of course it wasn't all that different. My wife and I lived in Westmount which was then the English speaking part of Montreal, and she and I both talked fluent French, so that wasn't a problem. I just enjoyed it, I had very congenial colleagues. Homer Byington was my chief; he was called a chief in those days, part of the jargon of the Department. It was a very congenial atmosphere and we made a lot of good friends.

*Q: How did you find Homer Byington?*

KIDDER: He was a delightful and wise person.

*Q: The name Homer Byington means a lot to me because my last job overseas was as Consul- general in Naples, and he was “Mr. Naples” for so many years.*

KIDDER: That's right; then his family went after him.

*Q: Did you get much of a chance to learn the ways of writing for the foreign service and all that?*

KIDDER: I would say not very much, because it was a routine job and didn't provide much occasion to do it.

*Q: Were you particularly interested at that time in the political life within Canada?*

KIDDER: Oh yes, I was quite fascinated. With Montreal being in Quebec, where we had a consul stationed in those days. There were all kinds of disputes going back and forth between the French-speaking and the English-speaking units in the society. We found a number of very good friends, and our first child was born there, and we were very much at home.

*Q: So you came back to a type of training period wasn't it? What did that consist of?*

KIDDER: It was a three or four month affair. I can't remember the name of the man who ran it. We found it -I think I share this view with my colleagues -not a particularly inspiring job to do. But we had some very interesting speakers in from time to time, and they gave us a good deal of time to get up and speak ourselves. I worked on my own public speaking by going to Dale Carnegie - I went three times to Dale Carnegie for speeches; I enjoyed it tremendously. (Mr. Kennedy: Those courses had a tremendous influence...) There were very congenial people in the course with us, and a number of my colleagues did it when they were preparing.

*Q: Now, you were at the Department in 1939; this was obviously a very exciting time because of the beginning of World War II.*

KIDDER: World War II was announced on my automobile radio as I drove from Montreal to Washington. I'll never forget it.

*Q: You were at a very junior level then, but often a young man in the Department would have a clearer vision than those caught up in it. Did you have the feeling that we were*

*cranking up to have a new role, or was it kind of business as usual? Did you have the feeling that the Department was getting ready for bigger things?*

KIDDER: Not that the Department was getting ready for bigger things; that probably hadn't occurred to me, I didn't know enough to know what they did anyway, but the four months we spent there, particularly in the care of Miss Basil, who was the women in charge of our little group, we learned a great deal I think.

*Q: Well now, your first overseas assignment was to Australia? to Sydney, you went there when?*

KIDDER: I went to Sydney in the very end of '39 or early '40. By ship of course.

*Q: Could you describe the situation? Australia came into the war but really hadn't felt its full impact; what was the situation as you saw it in Australia?*

KIDDER: Of course a great many of the young Australians were captured up in Singapore.

*Q: But that would have been in 1941. So we're talking about when you first arrived.*

KIDDER: Well, Australia was in the war

*Q: But only against Germany then...?*

KIDDER: That is correct, I don't quite know what to say...

*Q: This is prior to our entry, did you feel the Australians were annoyed at the Americans for not entering the war?*

KIDDER: No, not at all, I never had that feeling.

*Q: What type of work were you doing in Sydney?*

KIDDER: I primarily started out with Visas, citizenship and emigration.

*Q: Was there much of an effort on the part of Australians to leave?*

KIDDER: It was very much business as usual. They had been in for a bit and had settled down to it. I spent four and a half years there without ever going away.

*Q: Looking at the Biographic Register, you seem to have alternated between Sydney and Canberra.*

KIDDER: No, it wasn't really that, I was assigned while I was still in Sydney. I was made also a third secretary in Canberra, but I stayed in Sydney until I was sent down to Canberra full time.

*Q: Where were you when Australia came into the Japanese war, this would be December 8th, 1941.*

KIDDER: That was just before I left Sydney to go to Canberra.

*Q: What was the reaction as far as our embassy and consulate?*

KIDDER: It was a legation then; it had just been opened, they hadn't had diplomatic relations because Australia was part of the Commonwealth. In Washington, they had an Australian at the British embassy, and our consul general in Sydney was the key man. Then they opened relations with us and as third secretary I was transferred to Canberra. At that point, Foreign Service officers were very strongly advised...they didn't know where I was going to go...to get women and children out of the way, my wife and children came back to D.C., and I drove to Canberra, it was ridiculous, in retrospect; my wife left the children at home and came back and joined me later.

*Q: Nelson Johnson was our first Ambassador, he had came out of China; how was he as an Ambassador, he was the first Ambassador you had really run across...?*

KIDDER: Yes, but he was a minister...(Kennedy: Excuse, me I keep getting my terminology crossed...) It was an amusing situation in a sense. He and Clarence Goss had served together in China, and they didn't like each other. So I got a good deal of kickback on that. When I went to Canberra, Johnson was the minister. John Minter was the counselor, and he was in Canberra for a long period of time.

*Q: What type work were you doing in Canberra?*

KIDDER: Political reporting. We were four in the legation then: Minister, Counselor, and I was third secretary, and we had a commercial attach#. The military attach#s at that time were located in Melbourne. I think the Treasury attach# was there too; at that time Canberra was a town of 12,500 people, and the Australian government offices didn't really move there until the Labor government came in, then Canberra began to sprout, the way it is now.

*Q: Did you feel that you were almost superfluous, as part of the legation there?*

KIDDER: No, I found it actually fascinating. Since being such a tiny place, my wife and I knew all the foreign ministers and prime ministers by their first names, and since they had a terrible shortage of liquor and we didn't...(we had a garage full of Johnny Walker Black Label at $1.10 a bottle,)...we did a great deal of entertaining. It was to me very interesting, I enjoyed it, I spent a lot of time on the Canberra hill, where the parliament sat, and we entertained a lot of the ministers

*Q: Since this was during the war and all, I suppose this was the best relations we have ever had...*

KIDDER: Oh they were excellent, I had no problems at all that I recall.

*Q: Did you have problems that you would get involved in regarding our military? You have all these young men running around, and troops...*

KIDDER: No, you see they sent a lot of officers, the troops were mostly around Queensland, where MacArthur went when he came over. He did come down to Canberra a couple of times, where we saw him, but all the business was done in Brisbane and moved up into the islands. But talking about when the Japanese came into the war, we were in Sydney. Like all our friends, we fortified our garage, we put in all kinds of things, food, special timber... that we were all encouraged to do by the Australians. No one knew where the Japanese were going to strike.

*Q: Can you think of any issues the legation got involved in at that time, or was it pretty much smooth sailing?*

KIDDER: It was very smooth sailing, I don't remember any problems of any magnitude. The only problem was walking up a hill and going through the sheep. That was literally true, there were sheep all over the place. Of course there was black-out at night, but a lot of the roads didn't have buildings built along them yet, being only 12,500 people. It was quite fascinating and very informal.

*Q: Then you were involved very much in Brazilian affairs from 1944-1952? First in Belem 44- 46, and then in Rio from 1946 to 1949, and then you were officer in charge of Brazilian affairs from 1949-1952. How did you get to Belem in the middle of the war?*

KIDDER: I went into see whoever was Chief of Personnel in the Department of State. I can't remember now who it was, when we came back from Australia. He didn't say anything much, we just chatted, and then he looked at the world map behind him and said, “you know, I think they need somebody in Belem.” It was just as informal as that, and that is where I went. It was the first job I had as Consul, before that I was Vice-Consul, and the first time I was in charge of an office. In those days we had a big important air

base in Belem, as we did all down the Brazilian coast. There were two vice-consuls and a representative of the FBIin Belem.

*Q: That's right, the FBI had responsibility for what we would call CIA activities now, but for Latin American the FBI...*

KIDDER: ...that is correct. We had a very congenial fellow, there and myself and the two vice consuls...we had no Americans on the clerical staff so we did our own encoding.

*Q: What were your prime concerns in Belem?*

KIDDER: The reason I was sent there and the reason the office was there was to manage relations between the base and the city. The first two officers in charge at the military base were old timers, and there were no problems. There were a few problems when the third one came down. He hadn't had that type of experience, but there was never anything very serious. Our relations with them were excellent. There were other American organizations there at the time: the AID mission; and that played a very important role and so did the USIA mission.

*Q: What was the attitude of the Brazilians? They were in and by the time you were there they already had a division in Italy, but it was really the only Latin American country to make a significant contribution to the war effort. Why Brazil? —rather than Mexico or some other place.*

KIDDER: I guess that was a Brazilian decision of course, and it is a major country and they wanted to play a role in the world. They were ambitious, and of course it had many connections with Portugal and Spain and Italy. A great many connections with Italy. They just felt they had a role to play.

*Q: When you went down to Rio, that is, where our embassy was; what type of work were you doing? You were there in 1946-49, the war was over...*

KIDDER: ...primarily political reporting. There was one thing I never had and always subsequently deeply regretted —I never had any real economic work, and I think I paid for it in the long run.

*Q: I know this has always been a problem; we tend to turn this over to a specialist rather quickly, and it means that one can almost avoid doing this and we suffer. But what was the immediate post-war situation in Brazil?*

KIDDER: It was very, very friendly; there was a lot of American thinking about what businesses could be established, either unilaterally or bilaterally. Jack Tuthill was economic counselor, and I was political counselor; He was a very able officer.

*Q: He later became Ambassador, we interviewed him too.*

KIDDER: He did a great deal, he and Jack Reinstein who followed him, working with the Brazilians on economic and business affairs. I didn't touch it really.

*Q: On the political side, what was the situation in Brazil at that time?*

KIDDER: Well, the Brazilians were extremely friendly in the first place. My wife and I had the advantage of coming to Rio already speaking Portuguese. My wife is a very gifted linguist, I am not, but we did have a good command of Portuguese when we came to Rio, which helped a great deal. It was a pretty good idea, having one serve in a consulate before they got o the embassy.

*Q: I think it makes excellent sense.*

KIDDER: I worked with the foreign office and had very good relations with all of them. It was a little rough. We worked US office hours, 9-5, but the Brazilians didn't stop till 7 or 8. It made office hours very long, but we enjoyed it thoroughly.

*Q: What type of government was in Brazil at that time*

KIDDER: Vargas was there part of the time, and it was never a political democracy in any sense, in any of the time I were there.

*Q: Did we have any particular problems or issues that you would get involved with?*

KIDDER: I don't recall any issues at all in those days.

*Q: How did they view developments in Europe, were they particularly interested?*

KIDDER: Oh they were very interested, in those days Brazil was more focused on Europe than on the United States, very definitely...that is where their interests lay...most didn't speak English, but they were starting to learn it then. They mostly spoke French as a second language.

*Q: You had several ambassadors, non-career men, the first one was Adolf Berle. How was he as an ambassador?*

KIDDER: I didn't serve with him basically, except for a very short time, because I was in Belem. I had very little to do with the Embassy. I did make a trip with him and his wife, who was a remarkable woman, on the Air Force attach#'s plane, as I recall, a trip up through the Amazon, so I saw a good deal of him, and I found him to be an extremely congenial, intelligent man.

*Q: There was a feeling then that he was in command of the situation and was not there as a social appointee?*

KIDDER: No, nothing like that.

*Q: How about William D. Pauley, who was there '46-'48?*

KIDDER: He was quite a different story. We all had quite a rough first year with him till we all got to know each other. Then I became extremely fond of him and his wife. I think he learned an awful lot, learned to be a good ambassador.

*Q: What was the problem, wasn't he taking the time to learn?*

KIDDER: Oh yes, I think he was, he didn't learn the language, I think he spoke some Spanish, but he had had a lot of experience in the aviation business. He established routes for Pan American, so he knew a good deal about business, but he didn't know much about being an ambassador. It took him time. But he got along well with the Brazilians, as I say we on the staff grew very fond of him and his wife.

*Q: Then you had Herschel V. Johnson, from '48-'53. Was he there while you were there?*

KIDDER: Yes he was there, he was a very congenial fellow; he was not an “up” type, but he had had a lot of good experience. We got along well.

*Q: I gather William D. Crowley was a rather ...maybe this is the wrong term: flamboyant character.*

KIDDER: that is the wrong term...

*Q: Rather a hard charging?...*

KIDDER: He was, he did his business, and went hard at it, but he was very congenial, I think we were all very fond of him by the time he left.

*Q: How did you deal with the foreign ministry? Could you talk to middle level, upper level there, and were they able to make decisions or did everything have to be referred up to the top?*

KIDDER: No, we had good relations with the foreign office, at all levels. I became quite frustrated, I was a political counselor at this time, and the political section underneath me was divided into three sections, one handled European affairs, a second handled South American Affairs, and a third had Asia and all the rest. They were all three of them very able officers. I began to feel frustrated because I found that Cecil Lyon, who was the long-time minister, had his relationship up and the section chiefs had their relationship, too, below. I became quite frustrated because I wasn't quite sure where I was.

*Q: This is often the trouble for someone at a supervisory level, because you don't want to cut your subordinates...*

KIDDER: That's right, they had clear responsibility for certain sections. Actually, at that time there were nine officers in political affairs.

*Q: Later, you were going to be at the other end, but did you have any feel for what type of supervision you were getting or instructions, from Washington?*

KIDDER: I don't have any clear recollections at all. I don't believe there were ever any major problems.

*Q: ...probably it was significant that there were not people in Washington trying to fine tune what you were doing there.*

KIDDER: No, we were lucky to have Cecil Lyon there as the number two, because he had had a lot of experience in many places.

*Q: I might add we have interviewed Cecil Lyon and Jack Tuthill. But you didn't have any trouble contacting or getting in touch with the Brazilian government, or Foreign Ministry at all?*

KIDDER: No, we had no problems at all that I recall. We got along very well with them. I saw them quite often.

*Q: Were we keeping them informed of the rather dramatic changes in Europe and in our relations with our ally the Soviet Union, and all that...How did they react to this?*

KIDDER: As I recall, they had very good channels of their own, all over Europe. Their people were very experienced.

*Q: They had a professional foreign service, unlike some of the Latin American countries which used it as a form of exile or reward?*

KIDDER: It was a well built and well organized professional foreign service they had. The people you met with...most of them spoke French as their second language, and some spoke English. By that time I spoke Portuguese anyway...

*Q: Did you have any concern about the left in Brazil? Was this something that we were considering at that time?*

KIDDER: We followed it very carefully, but we had no real concern because it wasn't about to get in a position of power.

*Q: Then you came back to the Department in 1949, where you served from '49 to '52 in charge of Brazilian affairs. What was the situation? This would have been the second half of the Eisenhower years. What was the interest in Latin America at the top that you gathered at the time?*

KIDDER: I think it was quite high. Eddie Miller had been in charge of Latin American Affairs in the Department for quite a long time and had broad experience in Central and South America. He spoke both Brazilian and Spanish. We worked very well with him and

we had regular staff meetings, both small ones and big ones. It all went very smoothly and we had access to all levels we needed. Relations with Brazil were good all this time.

*Q: So you didn't have any of the frustration of feeling the area didn't count, no sense of "Look at us down here"..which has happened from time to time.*

KIDDER: Sure, but I never had that feeling.

*Q: To move ahead, you went to the National War College from 1952 to 1953. Then you were given one of these peculiar assignments where you were assigned to three countries at the same time. The names then meant little to anybody, but became household words later. You were assigned to Saigon, Phnom Penh, and Vientiane. How did that come about?*

KIDDER: Well, for one thing, I spoke French. I didn't expect anything in particular, but with my background I thought it might be Latin America...

*Q: But this was a ..what did the assignment entail? What was your job?*

KIDDER: Political...political reporting, political relations...

*Q: It was political reporting for Indochina?*

KIDDER: Right, in those days we had a Charg# d'affaires in Vientiane and in Phnom Penh. Mike Reeves was in the former.

*Q: That would be about equivalent to a Colonel?*

KIDDER: That is right. So they had their own offices. Our Ambassador in Saigon was minister to those two other countries. I had a chance to visit them several times.

*Q: Well, it was a period of time when the French were going through their death agony in Vietnam.*

KIDDER: They certainly were...

*Q: And how were we reacting at that point?*

KIDDER: I think a lot related to the use of the military. When I got there, there were practically no American military there, except an attach# or two. Of course it grew up and up till a Brigadier General was our attach#. He had no political sense what so ever.

*Q: So it was a routine assignment? The military sent somebody there without thinking this was really a hot spot?*

KIDDER: I don't know how they were assigned. The senior American military officer was a two star General up in Hanoi. In those days, our military attach# in Saigon was a Brigadier General. He was a nice fellow, but he had no political sense whatsoever. His reporting was generally what he thought Washington wanted to hear.

*Q: What was the situation, you had the French involved in the Dien Bien Phu incident; they were up in Hanoi. What down in Saigon? Was this considered a separate country at that point ?*

KIDDER: No, when Vietnam was split in two, we had to close our office in Hanoi, where we had had a consul and a vice-consul...

*Q: That was Toby Swank?.. no, Tom Corcoran?*

KIDDER: Yes, I can't remember who preceded Tom. But we worked together, I went up several times, and we got along very well with the French. I never found the Vietnamese people easy to get along with, as opposed to the Lao and the Cambodians, who were...

*Q: Did we feel at that point that there were Vietnamese to deal with?*

KIDDER: Oh yes, increasingly so. Ngo Dinh Diem, always worked late at night. I remember being called at 12 o'clock at night to see him.

*Q: What was his position at that time?*

KIDDER: He was Prime Minister.

*Q: What was your impression of him?*

KIDDER: I think he was a very able man. He was not popular with the French. He had a very rough job really, because he was neither one thing nor the other, while the French were really in command. We talked a lot in late evenings. He liked to talk a great deal. We got along very well with him, and his principal officers.

*Q: What were the major things that you were trying to accomplish, what was your major focus?*

KIDDER: Our major focus was the war. The way which we would operate together and a number of problems kept arising, none of them very serious. By and large, I think our relations were good.

*Q: I was in the Air Force, and I recall this vividly. As an enlisted man, and I was going to be discharged in 1954; yet there was a lot of talk after Dien Bien Phu which was what, early '54 or late '53?*

KIDDER: I think it was May of '54.

*Q: The French were trying to have us go in, and there was a debate about whether we would get involved or not. And so many of us were concerned about being kept on in the*

*military but what were we advising or saying we should do, what was the thinking about what we should do at our legation?*

KIDDER: It became an embassy about that time. The work with the French who were under the Governor General - I can't even remember his exact title - he was military while I was there. But Jean Daridan, a career diplomat, was high up in there, and I had known him before. By and large we got on extremely well with the Foreign Office people. They were very helpful to us. I think they understood our problems; their problems were serious, but they knew they were on the way out. The question was were we on the way in or what was going to happen? So I saw a great deal of the French and also of the Vietnamese military.

*Q: What were we trying to do at that time? Speaking from the embassy, there was Donald Heath who was our Ambassador...*

KIDDER: He was Ambassador for a long time. He was a wonderful fellow to work with...

*Q: He was my Ambassador when I was in Saudi Arabia. What was his thinking and what was the thinking of his staff about the situation and what we should do?*

KIDDER: He played a very quiet role. By then relations were a three pronged affair - French relations and Vietnamese... Laos and Cambodia didn't account for much then. Basically it was in Saigon...where Donald Heath who was a very able man, but very understated; he wasn't loquacious, or a man who sort of took the center stage. He was wonderful to work for. Basically it was a question of continuing our relations with the Vietnamese and the Vietnamese armed forces and also the French. Because that was certainly very important. The French were still ruling the roost.

*Q: How did you see this thing playing out at the time? Did you have any feeling about what we should do? Other than just what our instructions were?*

KIDDER: I felt very strongly that the United States should not get too deeply involved in Southeast Asia. Because I figured it was a losing game. At that time I think the total American military in Vietnam was around 300 to 400. We didn't want a vast American presence and of course there wasn't until after I had left. We felt very strongly that Americans should not get deeply involved in Southeast Asia. We figured it would be a losing game.

*Q: Before you went out, what was your impression of Sihanouk?*

KIDDER: I don't think he was taken very seriously, as seriously as we should have. He was regarded as something of a playboy. I think he was underrated.

*Q: Was this from within the Department, too?*

KIDDER: Yes.

*Q: Were you given any sort of instructions before you went to Saigon?*

KIDDER: I must have been but I don't remember them.

*Q: It was a hurry-up affair?*

KIDDER: It was a hurry up affair. I'd been out of touch with that part of the world for quite some time. We had a very competent fellow who had been in charge of the embassy who was transferred. I knew some of the French in Saigon who were in close contact with the Vietnamese and always talked very frankly with them. I never had a problem with the French.

*Q: What was the feeling when you went out, did you see Cambodia as purely a front for the North Vietnamese? Did you think there was something we could do to prevent the North from using it as a staging area?*

KIDDER: I don't think there was much optimism with regard to that. I think what they wanted me to do, and it was being done very well by the officer in Hanoi, were personal estimates of the Prince's views. How much power he had or didn't have, and during the time I was there I talked to the British and the French, and the Canadians, and others, the Australians, and I think the impression was he was a much more competent man than they thought he was. That was the reaction I got. But I never saw him while I was there.

*Q: How about our staff? Did you get any feel about the staff at the embassy the short time you were there?*

KIDDER: I can't remember who the charg# was when I arrived.

*Q: Were they sort of pessimistic about what was going to happen?*

KIDDER: I think by and large they were quite pessimistic. I saw no reason not to be.

*Q: Were you just told to leave by the Cambodians?*

KIDDER: No, I was told that they would not accept my credentials as ambassador. It was quite obvious there was no point in hanging around. I did for nearly a month, and so informed the department. They told me to stop in Paris and take care of Vietnamese and Lao affairs.

*Q: And then you came back to Washington, and you were the coordinator for the Senior Seminar?*

KIDDER: The senior seminar was just one element of my responsibilities, but I can't remember what they were. What do you have there?

*Q: All I have is coordinator of the senior seminar from '65 to '68. Part of the Foreign Service Institute wasn't it?*

KIDDER: Well, the FSI as an organization fell under me, but not directly. It was just a general liaison operation and evaluation to some extent, but nothing to do with the real running of it. I took the senior seminar course, which I enjoyed thoroughly. I thought it was very worthwhile. There was talk then about abolishing it, but I was quite certain they weren't going to, which they didn't for a while. But it was a very good job to work with all the military that were in it, or going out to the field in semi-diplomatic status for the first time. I thought it was a very useful operation.

*Q: Yes, I was in a senior seminar from 1974 to 1975, which I found fascinating and very worthwhile—and then you retired about this time?*

KIDDER: I was offered a job in Paris where my wife and I had first met and enjoyed five years in the Embassy. I accepted right away. I saw no particular point in hanging on.

*Q: What type of work were you doing in Paris?*

KIDDER: I was the European office of the Institute of International Education. They had a very fancy headquarters in New York, and I didn't know quite what to expect, but I was certainly shocked. I found I had one tiny little office and one secretary, who was a 22 year old. We didn't even have telephones that connected. She turned out to be a perfectly glorious person and really helped me and my wife tremendously. She married the man she was then living with and is now still in France.

*Q: What were your concerns there?*

KIDDER: In France, they had had the student strikes and all that, and the rioting. So from a political point of view I found it fascinating. The people I worked with were very interesting. What I was to do was report to the office of the Institute of International Education the changes that were going on in higher education which was in a state of flux, but I worked very closely with most of the senior people in the Universities.

*Q: Did you find it easy to have access to them?*

KIDDER: O yes, a lot of them had connections with the Institute, for a thousand dollars a year, and I worked closely with them. I had a very interesting time in Spain and Portugal and Italy. The FSI finally decided that they didn't need European offices. I went to work for The Conference Board... I was their man for Europe.

*Q: The Conference Board is a major sort of think tank, isn't it? And brings together people particularly from the business world to look at International affairs and its concerns with business, and make reports?*

KIDDER: They were very well received by the people high up in all the foreign countries that I visited. There I stayed in the best hotels, while with the Institute of International Education I stayed in the worst hotels.

*Q: Well, Mr. Ambassador this sort of brings an end to our interview. Two questions we ask at this point: Looking back on your career, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?*

KIDDER: I think the Foreign Service Inspection Corps.

*Q: You really felt...*

KIDDER: I felt it had a job to do, and in the point of view of personal interests, seeing all these different places was interesting. You had to work darn hard to get to know a country in West Africa where you were going in two weeks as an inspector. You had to know what the problems were, before you could talk about them, and you learned an awful lot in a hurry. Bob Brewster was then administrator, and he went high up. He was a wonderful man to work with, and his dear wife Mary. The fellow with whom I traveled my second year was a nice guy, but he didn't have the same ability by any means.

*Q: I felt that in many ways it was the inspection corps that knits the foreign service together, to keep it from being just a bunch of little separate Dukedoms without a cohesiveness.*

KIDDER: It tends to, or it did, I guess it is vastly different now. You cannot be critical for this, and you cannot be critical for that, and you can't mention drink or alcohol in your reports as an inspector.

*Q: All the things that actually count...*

KIDDER: Things that seem to me to count...I generally showed the reports to the people I reported on.

*Q: The final question we ask is, a young person comes to you and says. "Mr. Ambassador, what do you thing of the foreign service as a career for me?" How would you respond?*

KIDDER: Well, I am very much of two minds about that because the physical danger to their families is something, it is so vital, so important now. I used to wander around Saigon in a pair of blue jeans and a sport shirt by myself. Nobody bothered me. It never occurred to me that anyone would.

*Q: I was Consul-general in Saigon from '69 to '70. I did the same thing.*

KIDDER: The change was so...I think I would probably do it again, but it is a different world. I gather they are getting good people. I keep my interest in it. Those I meet abroad are very fine people.

*Q: Mr. Ambassador I want to thank you very much for this...*

KIDDER: My name is Randy.

*Q: This is a later addition to the interview, you mention that you had an experience in Saigon?*

KIDDER: Yes, I was charg# d'affaires, in a rather weird position because the personal representative of the President with the rank of Ambassador was my boss. But he never presented credentials, so I remained technically the charg# d'affaires, and signed all his telegrams, which surprised his aides considerably. He was a very fine man to work with, but he and I didn't quite agree on some things. He said he wanted me to say exactly what I thought, which I did, much to the alarm of the two Colonels who worked for him. But anyway, he was called to Washington for several weeks. The problems of what was going to happen to Vietnam was very much a toss-up and the personality of Ngo Dinh Diem... should we or should we not help him out, should we support him? I believed we should support him and when my boss, the general, was back in Washington talking to all the higher-ups, I was called one day to see the French General in command. I'd been to see Ngo Dinh Diem twice that day, and the French Commander-in-Chief who was the principal French representative in Saigon, I saw twice that day. It was a very, very busy day, and the thing that the French had decided was they would no longer support Ngo Dinh Diem, would try to get him replaced. In the meantime, Ngo Dinh Diem had I thought done a remarkably good job. And I took the liberty without any instructions from Washington - I had none - I decided that we would not support the French in trying to get rid of Diem; on the contrary, we would support him. And I reported that to the Department in a carefully worded telegram by Frank Meloy who was an expert, and for three days I got no results. Nothing. The third day I got a very brief telegram of congratulations. It was very moving for me. I had had no instructions, and I knew that the general, my boss, did not agree with me. I had pointed that out in the telegram, but under the circumstances we had to support Diem and not have him thrown out by the French.

*Q: This was 1955?*

KIDDER: Well, it was not long before I left. That was the only time I had to make a decision for the government without any instructions.

*Q: This came up after the interview because we were discussing the feeling in Washington that with the telephone, they don't need anyone out in the field. They are calling the shots. But again and again when things are moving fast, that's not the case. It gets lost sight of.*

KIDDER: When I saw the French Commander-in-Chief in Saigon, he was very, very surprised. He knew what my boss thought, so he was very surprised when I told him what our position was.

End of interview